

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease Sighted In St. Thomas Waters

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Planning and Natural Resources announced Friday that the Division of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) is alerting the Virgin Islands community of the emergence of the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), which was recently found on St. Thomas.

SCTLD is a lethal coral disease that can affect roughly half of the coral species in the US Virgin Islands. The cause of the disease is unknown, but scientists do know that it is transmittable through water. SCTLD will attack all stony corals, but will affect brain and pillar corals first, and then move quickly through the rest of the stony coral, leaving behind large areas of bright white skeletons, D.P.N.R. said. SCTLD doesn't pose a

threat to human health, but will damage corals that provide food, tourism value, and physical protection from waves during storms, the release said.

D.P.N.R. is asking the general public to be on the look out for this disease when swimming, snorkeling, or diving throughout the territory. Look for large areas of bright white skeleton on corals, especially on brain and pillar corals. Report sightings and Visit www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch and download the Bleach Watch app, or report directly through the website. Be sure to include photos and location information. If you are unable to make a report, call Coastal Zone Management at 340-774-3320 or email czm@dpnr.vi.gov

For more information, call D.P.N.R. at 340-774-3320 extension 5115.

D.P.N.R. is also asking residents to protect all coral by taking the following action: don't anchor on coral, know what's below when you drop your anchor. Stand only in sand. Don't touch, kick, or stand on coral.